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Letters to the Editor

Katina Strauch
Against the Grain

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Letters



Keep 'em coming!

Dear Editor:

I really enjoyed the February issue of *Against the Grain*. I especially liked the interview with Connie May Fowler and "You Gotta Go To School For That" by Jerry Seay. I even tried to explain to Pam Cenzer who Kirstie Alley was (you might imagine that she was very interested).

Sincerely,
Susan Campbell
(York College of Pennsylvania)

Dear Editor:

Reading my way through the first issue of *ATG* ever to cross my desk, I came upon *Sibling Rivalry*. I was particularly interested in the topic, because we are just about to launch our own CD list under the Mansell imprint — first two titles *Access Japan* and *Access Personnel Management*. The sentence "Also, librarians said that they considered CD-ROM to be a 'transient' technology and did not want to invest heavily in CD-ROM" surprised me, because the market research which we have carried out here in London and via our New York office gives a very different picture. The statistics — if I dare quote such things — indicate that there are now well over 5 million CD-ROM drives in use globally, projected to have risen to 8.5 million by the end of this year, and over 5000 disks available now, from 3000 publisher/producers. (My sources are TFPL's *CD-ROM Directory*, and speakers at IOLIM 92 and Publishers' Association seminars.) About the only figure that is falling rather than rising is the price of the hardware — halved over the last eighteen months — partly because of the recession in Western economies, and partly because the price of almost anything will tend to fall once it is possible to mass-produce it.

All the indications are that CD-ROM, and other related products, such as CD-ROM/XA, CD-I, and Photo-CD, have a long life ahead of them. True, they are constantly changing and im-

proving technologies, but surely that only makes them more likely to continue to exist, not to vanish entirely.

Sincerely,
Feona J. Hamilton
Commissioning Editor
Mansell Publishing

Dear Editor:

I was much amused by Rookie Librarian's account in the February issue of your estimable publication of how things go sometimes in tech services out your way. Those undemanding little items can cause a problem or two, that is clear. Rookie Librarian is right, incidentally, in what he says about the James J. Kilpatrick/Shana Alexander exchanges of all those years ago. They were surprisingly vituperative and entertaining, Alexander determinedly ignoring Kilpatrick's bad temper and Kilpatrick goaded by that into further excesses of grumpiness. Those were the days. It is likely true that Kilpatrick is more fruitfully employed in dealing with semicolons and amphibologies than in attempting to straighten out the world and the likes of Shana Alexander.

All the best to you,
Peter Gellatly
(The Haworth Press)

Dear Editor:

My personal subscription to *ATG* has finally come through and I am very delighted with it. It's full of good shop-talk and can be read in odd free moments in the bus, or kitchen or garden. Please don't go electronic.

Elizabeth Silvester
(McLennan Library,
McGill University)

Dear Editor:

I have just spent the last hour and a half reading through a few complimentary issues of *Against the Grain*

which Edna Laughrey was kind enough to send me. I am compelled to write you words of congratulations which you obviously do not need.

I have read many publications concerning themselves with libraries and publishers over the past forty years and most of them as you undoubtedly are aware are rather dull and boring. I found your publication, which I had never heard of before, to be most interesting, fun to read and informative. [Dora Biblarz's] interview with my old friend Richard Abel reminded me of the days when we were all young Turks. [Julia Gelfand's] interview with Sir Chadwyck-Healey reminded me how far people can go on their own initiative and become successful in this industry. I also enjoyed reading about those people who I have not seen in many years but remember well.

Once again, congratulations on publishing such an interesting journal.

Sincerely,
Herbert M. Johnson
(Publisher, JAI Press, Inc.)

Dear Editor:

The April issue is packed with useful and interesting information. *ATG* is clearly the best forum extant for publisher-vendor-librarian information exchange and debate.

Sincerely yours,
Mark Sexton
(Mark Sexton Associates)

Dear Editor:

I vote in favor of the new paper. My issue arrived in pristine condition. The glossy paper was incredibly hard to read, what with adjusting it for glare every half-paragraph.

Thanks for the change!

Sincerely,
Kathryn Dudley
(Carpenter Library,
Bowman Gray School of Medicine)

Dear Editor:

My favorite cartoon of the days when cartoons were funny was George Bungle. His favorite philosophy was "Let sleeping dogs lay down". Perhaps I should follow this philosophy in regard to Leonard Schrift's letter in the February issue of *ATG*.

On the other hand, I don't believe that it is fair to Leonard or Richard Abel to let things lay. I suggest to my friend Lenny that he take a look at Bill Schenck's letter (same issue). I believe Bill has caught the intent of both Dora Biblarz and Dick in their collaboration. I have talked to both of these people and they seem to be a bit surprised at Lenny's reaction.

For the record and for the sake of harmony, I would like to make two

comments:

1. I have known Dick for almost thirty years and I am sure, as I re-read the remarks in question that he had no intention of being condescending nor of casting epithets at his fellow booksellers past and present.

2. The term "bean counters" was intended to describe the driving power behind publishers and booksellers in the last thirty or forty years of this century. No longer do we have publishers who have only the interest of authors and readers in mind; they are compelled by their money managers (i.e. bean counters) to mind the bottom line more than the best interest of literature and the good life. No longer can an energetic, brilliant young mind espouse a cause, such as improving book distribution, without submitting to the bean counters. I am not going to con-

tend that Abel had no intention of making money, but I have always been convinced that more importantly he was driven by a desire to improve the distribution of knowledge via books in libraries.

Having worked very closely with Dick, I agree completely with his feelings that his company would have survived had the bean counters in publishing houses been able to perceive that Richard Abel and Company was bent on improving their lot as well as the libraries'.

Yours very truly,
Lyman W. Newlin
(Book Trade Counselor)

New Feature - Plus Ça Change

Column Editor: **Karen Schmidt** (U. of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign)



Cheap Versus Quick Revisited

*The more things change, the more they stay the same... A little historical perspective is a good thing. With this issue, we welcome the fabulous **Karen Schmidt** who will be editing a regular column on the history of our world of acquisitions and collection development. This is gonna be fun! — Yr. Ed.*

Do you wait to get a book as cheaply as you can, or do you get it quickly, disregarding the price? This is a tussle that many of us have been through over the years. Indeed, it is something of a rite of passage for acquisitions librarians, with the outcome symbolically placing you with your own kind. With this test, you become either the Careful Steward or the Efficient Servant.

We have heard all the arguments pro and con. But did you know that the war has been raging for over 100 years? *The Library Journal* in 1884 reports at length on discussions of this very topic between Herr Dziatzko and Herr Petzholdt, two gentlemen whose role in life was — despite some research — not that clear. (Petzholdt and Dziatzko seem to have been engaged as bibliographers working with the *Centralblatt*

fuer Bibliothekswesen and the *Neuer Anzeiger*.)

It seems that American, English, and German booksellers were complaining that their business was in decay and that libraries ought to support them in their own countries. *Apropos* this egregious situation, Herr Dziatzko proposed the principle that librarians should be able to buy the books needed as cheaply as possible, regardless of where they might be purchased.

Petzholdt challenged him, saying that it was much more important to get books as quickly as possible. His way, he insisted, ensured that the public

"... the agent is the natural medium." — Herr Petzholdt

would not be disappointed or forced to buy books using their own money. In Petzholdt's dealings with booksellers, he made it clear that he would never take all his books from one agent, but would take from those who could produce them the quickest. It was clear, he opined, that booksellers, once assured of your business, would take copies intended for your library and use them to make new customers of other libraries. In defense of the lowly

bookseller, however, Petzholdt insisted that all of library dealings should be with the agent and not the publisher, since the agent is "the natural medium."

A study of transcontinental publishing conducted a few years after this discussion revealed that American editions of English publications were more expensive, and that nearly \$20.00 could be saved by purchasing the English editions. The Macmillans in particular were called to task for this, with the study pointing out that a title from their U. S. catalog costing 68 cents in this country could be purchased, as an English edition from an English firm, for 50 cents.

The general feeling among librarians attending the Dziatzko-Petzholdt disagreement was that Dziatzko's principle should be upheld. "There can be no doubt that the duty of the librarian, public, proprietary, or collegiate, is to get as much as he can with the money intrusted to his charge... If the retail dealer supplies a want of the community, he will be sustained; if in the new conditions of society he does not, no sacrifice that the libraries can make will be able to retain him in existence."

And so followers of the Careful Steward school will find an historical imperative for their point of view. ☞